

Testimony in Support of Funding for Gun Violence Prevention

March 3, 2023

Distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Aileen Brill and I live in Westport. I am a member of the Advocacy Committee of the Council of Churches of Greater Bridgeport (the "Council") and a former Board member of the Council.

I am testifying in support of the \$2.5 million included in the Governor's budget on Line T1449 for the Department of Public Health to fund gun violence intervention grants in FY2024, and the \$400,000 on Line 274 for operational expenses each year.

The Council is a faith-based, non-sectarian social services agency dedicated to meeting the needs of people at risk and breaking the cycle of poverty and crisis in the Greater Bridgeport area. We have witnessed the devastation wrought by the ongoing threat of violence in Bridgeport. Getting guns off the street is a first step. To that end, the Council partnered with the Bridgeport Police Department in 2021 and 2022 and carried out three successful gun buybacks. During these events, we also distributed free gun locks and gun safes in an effort to promote awareness of the laws requiring safe storage of firearms in Connecticut. The gun buybacks were funded by the Council, member congregations and private donors who share our passion to make Bridgeport a safe community where families can thrive.

Getting guns off the street is only one component of a comprehensive approach to reducing urban gun violence. Intervention programs are critical to diffusing a crisis and restoring a safe and healthy society. Moreover, a permanent Office of Gun Violence Prevention with committed funding at the state level is needed to address this public health crisis.

According to the Giffords Law Center, gun violence is estimated to directly cost Connecticut taxpayers at least \$90 million annually. Failing to address the cause of this staggering expense is fiscally irresponsible. Investing more in community-based violence prevention programs would not only save lives and reduce the trauma inflicted on these communities, it would save taxpayer money.

I commend Governor Lamont for proposing \$2.5 million to fund community gun violence programs. However, I urge the legislature to do more given the budget surplus. Gun violence is an urgent public health crisis that demands the state invest more to save lives.

Sincerely,

Aileen Brill
Westport, CT

Cc: Senator Ceci Maher, Representative Dominique Johnson